

Toward a More Readable Translation of *Tannishô* 歎異抄—より分かりやすい英訳を目指して

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Summary

Tannishô is one of the basic documents of Shin Buddhism, which was founded by Shinran (1173–1262) in the middle of the 13th century during the Kamakura Period. After Shinran's death a great confusion occurred in the Shin Buddhist School with the rising of a number of heretical teachings. In lamentation over these heretical teachings, Shinran's student, named Yui-en, recorded the words he had heard directly from the mouth of Shinran. Its nature is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to Matthew.

The text consists of eighteen chapters with a preface and a postscript. The first ten chapters are a collection of Shinran's words. Chapter 1 is a nutshell outline of Shin Buddhism. It is short but contains the whole logic of Shinran's teaching. The last eight chapters are arguments against heresies. The topics are very contemporary since many cults which call themselves new religions are using the tactics classified as heresies in Chapters 11 through 18.

The proposed English translation is not a literal translation. Emphasis is placed more on conveying the meaning than maintaining linguistic correctness. The use of jargon is avoided as much as possible and the level of language is kept at the level of everyday usage.

Key Words

Tannishô, Shin Buddhism, Shinran, Japanese Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism

The purpose of this article is to create a more readable English translation of *Tannishô*. When Buddhist sutras were translated from Sanskrit to Chinese, certain key terms were left in Sanskrit, and Chinese characters were used to transcribe the original Sanskrit pronunciation. When Chinese translation was offered, it was often strict literal translation which did not convey the original meaning. Sanskrit terms such as “nirvana” (Japanese “nehan” or “nehanna”), “pāramitā” (Japanese “haramitsu” or “paramitta”), and Sanskrit “prajñā” or Pali “paññā” (Japanese “hannya”) are only a few of such examples. When Buddhism was introduced to Japan, the Japanese never bothered to translate the Chinese writings into Japanese since they were able to read Chinese. It was not even necessary to make an attempt to translate since Buddhism was practiced only by the educated and the privileged of the time who were able to read Chinese.

When Japanese Buddhism was brought into the English-speaking world, mostly through immigrants, the same practice remained: they brought the Sanskrit terms into English. Even worse, they also brought some Japanese terms as well. The practice might have been acceptable when the first- and second-generation immigrants understood Japanese. However, the newer generations are lost in the labyrinth of jargon. While visiting Canada and talking with younger and educated members of the local Buddhist temple affiliated with Hongwanji, the author felt a strong need for a more colloquial and logical explanation of Buddhist terminol-

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ogy. As an initial attempt, offering a more readable English translation of *Tannishô* could serve the purpose. By “readable” it is meant “jargon-free.” The following examples will illustrate how jargons are carried into the English language:

- “Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida’s Vow, I shall realize birth into the Pure Land”: the moment you entrust yourself thus, so that the mind set upon saying the Name arises within you, you are brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned. (Hirota: 1982, p.22, “Chapter 1.”)
- At the very moment the desire to call the Nembutsu is awakened in us in the firm faith that we can attain rebirth in the Pure Land through the saving grace of the Inconceivable Grand Vow, the all-embracing, none-forsaking virtue of Amida is conferred on us. (Higashi Honganji, 1961, p.2)
- The moment one gains confidence in life awakened by the inner nature of human beings, designed by the Larger Life of the unimaginable universe, and one feels it is natural to say “Oh, yes. That’s the way things are,” one is met with the benefit of unconditional salvation which will never fail. (Proposed translation)

Tannishô is pronounced “Tan-knee-show” in English convention. “Tan” means “lamentation,” “ni” means “heresy,” and “shô” means “excerpt.” The explanatory translation of “*Tannishô*” could be “Words of Shinran Recorded in Lamentation over Heretical Teachings.” Shinran (1173–1262) is regarded as the founder of Shin Buddhism (Jôdo Shinshû). It is also called Pure Land Buddhism because the literal translation of “Jôdo” is “Pure Land.” “Shin” means “true” and “shû” means “creed.” After Shinran’s death, there was a great confusion in the Shin Buddhist School with regard to the true meaning of Shinran’s teachings. In lamentation over the heretical teachings advocated by some of the former students of Shinran, *Tannishô* was written.

The author did not credit himself by recording his name on *Tannishô*. However, we can easily guess the name of the author, because Shinran addressed him by name in the dialogue in Chapter 9. His name is Yuien, but we know virtually nothing about him. He was a young student of Shinran who heard his teaching directly from his mouth, and in later years, when a confusion in the school arose, he tried to inform the sincere followers of what the true teaching of Shinran was by citing the words of Shinran.

Since space is limited, detailed interpretation of the document is not offered here. Only those items relevant to translation are mentioned. This version is not a literal, word-for-word translation. Emphasis has been placed more on conveying the meaning than trying to maintain linguistic accuracy. There have already been linguistically correct translations. However, they were linguistically so faithful to the original that they did not convey the true meaning. Some translations left the jargon in the original language or in literal English translation without clarifying its meaning. “Amida,” “Nembutsu,” “Primal Vow,” and “Other Power” are some of such examples. In this version, efforts are made to avoid the use of jargon.

Shinran is often called “Shinran-Shonin” in this version. “Shonin” literally means “Holy Person,” but in its usage, it is a title which is equivalent to “The Reverend” or “The Most Reverend.” Hence, an expression like “the Shonin” is also used when we know the name of the specified person. Shinran’s teacher Honen is also called “Honen-Shonin.” Incidentally, the circumflex “^” over a vowel indicates this vowel is a long

vowel. Therefore, “Honen-Shonin” is actually “Hōnen-Shōnin.” However, these circumflexes are omitted in the English translation.

“Larger Life” is the translation of “Amida.” In Shin Buddhism, Larger Life is one of the most central concepts. Amida is often personified and treated like a person, but it means “inconceivable amount of life and light,” which actually is the working of the universe. Whatever the phenomenon we see in the natural world, that phenomenon may be regarded as the working of the universe. Our heartbeat, for example, is a manifestation of this working which is totally out of human control. Recognizing this working and knowing the powerlessness of human efforts is a crucial part of Shin Buddhist teaching. Our human life on the earth is a small life compared with this Larger Life of universe which is making everything happen.

“Grand Design” is the translation of “gan,” which is often translated as the “Vow.” In this version, the word “Vow” is avoided because it is also a personified expression. The standard story is that Amida has made a Vow to save everybody unconditionally, but personifying the story in this way reduces the teaching down to any ordinary religion. Then it does not have to be Shin Buddhism. The “Grand Design,” in today’s term, is the design of our DNA, the human traits already imbedded in our genes. Salvation in Shin Buddhism is the awakening or sobering up from a quasi-intoxicated state. In general, human beings are highly self-centred, always on an ego trip, who see things only in the way they want to see, who think the world is revolving around them, and who is unable to see their place in the world. All the worldly suffering is caused by this self-centredness. Thus, waking up to see the world as it is the key to removing all the sufferings, and it is this which constitutes salvation. This salvation is applicable unconditionally to everyone because the ability to wake up is already designed in our genes. When a person encounters a right occasion, this ability is activated.

“Oh, yes. It is so,” or “Oh, yes. That’s the way things are,” are the translations of “Nembutsu,” or uttering the phrase “Nam-Amida-butsu.” It is said that the utterance of Nembutsu, or calling the Name of Amida does not occur through an intentional effort of an individual. Rather, it is given by Amida. The phrase “Nam-Amida-butsu” literally means “Bowing before the Inconceivable Life.” This is a total submission of self to the working of the universe, accepting everything the way it is. If this state of mind is expressed in everyday language, it is “Oh, I see,” or more precisely, “Oh, yes. That’s the way things are.” This phrase comes out of one’s mouth unconsciously when one realizes something or discovers something. This ability to realize is imbedded in our genes or designed by the working of the Larger Life of the universe. Hence, it is given by Amida.

Salvation is the removing of all mental suffering. Recognizing the causes of suffering is the key to salvation. When a person is so self-centred, everything has to revolve around him and everything has to happen the way he wants it to happen. But the reality is that it doesn’t. When it doesn’t, the sufferings increase. The process of becoming able to see this reality constitutes an awakening. Thus, the term “awakening” is synonymous with salvation.

“Pure State of Being” is the paraphrases of Pure Land or *Jodo*. It is taught that all human beings go to the Pure Land unconditionally after death. Pure means being free from all worldly desires, blind passions, sins and evil deeds. The term “Land” is sometimes used meaning “state” or “condition.” Therefore, it is more reasonable to say one enters into the Pure State after death rather than going to the Pure Land. In some non-Shin Buddhist denominations, devotees try to achieve this state while they are still alive, but in Shin Buddhism it occurs only after death.

Enlightenment is synonymous with entering the Pure State or attaining Buddhahood. It is the translation of Sanskrit “Nirvana.” It only happens at the time of death in Shin Buddhism. One might wonder why it is necessary to make such a big deal about the conditions after death. The reality is that the major concern of most religions in the world is what might happen after death. Many radical or extreme activities are triggered by beliefs regarding the afterlife. Because of the similarity of the terms “enlightenment” and “awakening,” it is often misunderstood that enlightenment occurs during one’s life time. But the Shin Buddhist logic is that when one is awakened to see the world the way it is, the path to enlightenment becomes clear and one becomes able to keep on living without worries. This is also called “confidence in life”.

“Confidence” is the translation of “shinjin,” which literally means the “mind to believe.” Religion is often regarded as an act of believing. However, if one is led to believe in something, anything goes, and it is sometimes highly dangerous. “Shin” in “shinjin” is not, incidentally, the same as “Shin” in Shin Buddhism. In Shin Buddhism, as long as one remains in the realm of believing, one wouldn’t get very far. All other religions tell you to believe in something and it is simply a matter of choice. Another meaning of “shin” in Japanese is “confidence,” the feeling it is all right with no doubts or illusions about the way one lives. Once this confidence is established through awakening, one is able to live on.

Although the term “tariki” appears several times in *Tannishō* and the traditional translation of “tariki” is “Other Power,” neither term appears in this English version because a more understandable term is offered to illustrate “Other Power.” The following is a comparison of past two translations and the proposed one: This sentence appears in the “Preface.”

- One must not distort the fundamental significance of Other Power in any way with words of understanding based on one’s own views. (Hirota: p.51)
- Do not violate the essential doctrine of the Pure Land teaching through your own arbitrary interpretations. (Higashi Honganji: p.1)
- We must not distort and confuse the basic teaching of an unselfish way of life with words of personal understanding based on our own views. (Proposed translation)

Another example from Chapter 3 reads as follows:

- However, when a person overturns his heart of self-power and entrusts himself to Other Power, he will realize birth in the true fulfilled land. (Hirota, p.61)
- But if he reorients his ego-centered mind and acquiesces in Amida’s Grand Will, he will attain rebirth in the True Land of Fulfilment. (Higashi Honganji, p.6)
- However, once we turn around and stop relying on our own will and power, and entrust ourselves to the workings of Larger Life of the universe, we are sure to attain enlightenment in the true sense. (Proposed translation)

“Other Power” is the working of Larger Life of universe and it is often used in contrast with “self efforts,” which is explained as conceited feelings that any achievement is brought about through one’s own efforts. On the contrary, the teaching of Shin Buddhism is that any occurrence is brought about by a number of vari-

ables. Most of these variables are not visible and lie outside your own domain, hence called “Other Power.”

This is only a first attempt at creating a more readable translation of *Tannishō*. When it is read by a third person, there may still be many points that are not clear in their meanings. The translator hopes to upgrade the text as many times as necessary until a universally acceptable version is completed. For this purpose, any comment or criticism would be greatly appreciated.

***Tannishō* :**

Words of Shinran Recorded in Lamentation over Heretical Teachings

Preface

As I quietly ponder my humble thoughts and compare the time when our teacher Shinran-Shonin was alive and the time when he has long passed away, I can only lament the fact that so many heretical teachings prevail today that have gone off track from the teaching of true faith orally delivered by him. Such a situation makes one worry that possible doubts and confusions may arise among those who seriously wish to study and inherit his teachings. How would it be possible for us to enter the world of easy awareness without the guidance of the distinguished teachers in the past whose paths have fortunately crossed with ours? We must not distort and confuse the basic teaching of an unselfish way of life with words of personal understanding based on our own views.

Accordingly, while they remain vividly in my ears, I would like to record here some important points of lessons I heard directly from the mouth of late Shinran-Shonin. I do this solely for the purpose of removing the doubts held by my fellow seekers of true faith.

Chapter 1

The moment one gains confidence in life awakened by the inner nature of human beings, designed by the Larger Life of the unimaginable universe, and one feels it is natural to say “Oh, yes. That’s the way things are,” one is met with the benefit of unconditional salvation which will never fail. The Grand Design by the Larger Life does not discriminate between the old and the young or the good and the evil. All it takes is an awakening resulting in confidence in life. This happens because the inner nature of the human being is designed solely to bring salvation to all mankind who carry evil thoughts that are so deep and heavy and who hold emotions that are burning like fire. Thus, in gaining confidence through the recognition of the Grand Design, no other good deeds will become necessary. For nothing is superior to the ability to see the way things are. No other evil deeds should be feared. For there is no evil that will hinder the ability to see the way things are. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 2

I take it that the reason you have travelled the distance of over ten provinces without minding your own bodies and lives is solely to inquire about the way of life free of sorrows and sufferings. If you are expecting in me that I might know some way to establish confidence in life other than accepting the facts of life as they are or that I might be well versed in teachings and writings based on certain sutras, you are greatly mistaken.

If the purpose of your pursuit is academic justification, you can visit the distinguished scholars of Tendai Sect on Mt. Hiei north of Kyoto or those of the earlier sects existing in the southern capital of Nara and inquire to your satisfaction about the essentials of the so-called Rebirth. As for myself, Shinran, there is no special consideration other than entrusting myself to the teaching of my teacher Honen-Shonin, who taught me simply to seek salvation by learning to accept the way things are.

Whether being able to see things the way they are and saying, “Oh, yes. It is so,” is the key to being born into the Pure Land or the road straight down to hell, I simply have no idea. I would have no regret at all even if I fell into hell by listening to Honen-Shonin, whose teaching is to accept everything and become able to say “Oh, yes. That’s the way things are.” If I could otherwise attain Buddhahood through my own efforts and yet ended up in hell by following my teacher Honen-Shonin, I would regret a great deal for having been tricked by him. Since no efforts of my own are good enough to attain peace of mind, if I kept relying on self endeavour, I would never get out the state of hell.

If the Grand Design of human nature which is capable of awakening to truth is true and real, the teachings of Śākyamuni the Buddha cannot be void. If the teachings of Śākyamuni the Buddha are true and real, the interpretive writings of Shan-tao the high priest cannot be lies. If the interpretive writings of Shan-tao the high priest are true and real, what my teacher Honen-Shonin has told me cannot be void. If what Honen-Shonin has told me is true and real, how could what I Shinran tell you possibly be void? In sum, this is the basis on which the confidence of this humble being in faith stands. This is as much as I can tell you. Beyond this, it is up to each of you whether you establish confidence in life by adhering to the teachings that awaken you or abandon these teachings. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 3

Even those who claim to be virtuous are subject to salvation; how much more so those who realize they are wicked! However, people usually say, “Even the wicked are subject to salvation, how much more so the virtuous!” This statement seems to make sense at a glance, but it goes against the basic teaching of selfless awareness brought about by the Grand Design of human nature. The reason is that those people who try to accumulate merit through their own will and doing simply lack the humbleness to recognize that the Larger Life of the universe is constantly working upon them, and they are not true to the human nature designed in them.

However, once we turn around and stop relying on our own will and power, and entrust ourselves to the workings of the Larger Life of the universe, we are sure to attain enlightenment in the true sense. Since we human beings are laden with lust, desire, and blind passions, and no act of our own can free ourselves from the suffering of birth, life, and death, we are also provided with an ability by the compassionate design of the Larger Life to be awakened to see the truth of life. Such a design is solely to open up the eyes of those who are self-centred and self-contented. Awakening to see the ugly state of mind and realizing how wicked we have been will certainly lead us to life free from worries and stresses. This is why our teacher Shinran-Shonin said even those who claim to be virtuous are subject to salvation; how much more so those who realize they are wicked!

Chapter 4

As for compassion, there is a distinction between the compassion of those who live the life of Sages and

that of those who live the life of the Pure State of being. The compassion held by those who live the life of Sages is to pity, to sympathize with, and to reach out to help. However, it is extremely difficult to help others in most satisfactory manners. The compassion of those who live the life of the Pure State of being arises from awareness of the true nature of mankind. Those who understand the true nature can empathize with those who are distressed and share the great sadness and bring salvation to them. This holds true because, in the undertaking of worldly affairs, no matter how much pity we feel for others or how much we sympathize with them, it is hardly possible to help them exactly in the way they want to be helped. Thus, there are limits to the compassion of Sages. Hence, compassion held by those who can see things the way they are is the only kind of compassion that is thoroughgoing. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 5

I Shinran have never practiced Buddhism for the benefit of my departed father or mother. The reason is that all living things are related to each other as parents and children and brothers and sisters through their coming and going in this world. Every one of them will eventually bring salvation to others by returning to the Larger Life of the universe and working upon them. If practicing Buddhism consisted of virtuous deeds of self effort, doing so might bring merit to our deceased parents, but it certainly does not. We should stop relying on selfish efforts to accumulate merit for our own sakes, and we should become aware of the workings of the Larger Life of the universe. Only by doing so, can we bring salvation through the working of the Larger Life to those who suffer various aspects and forms of human life. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 6

It is totally out of the question to dispute over whose disciples our fellow practitioners of Buddhism are. I Shinran do not have a single disciple. The reason is that I would call someone my disciple if it were I that opened the eyes of a person and brought him to his senses, but it is the innate nature of the human being which is designed by the working of the Larger Life of the universe that opens human eyes. It is outrageous to call a person thus awakened my disciple. People come together when their paths cross and depart when circumstances change. Such is the nature of our life. It is inexcusable to threaten a person by saying if he/she went to other teachers and listened to their teachings, he/she would be excluded from salvation. Wouldn't this person be trying to take credit for someone's awakening to the facts of life, which is actually caused by the Grand Design of the Larger Life? I must repeat: this should never happen.

If one's awareness is in accord with the way things are, one will naturally become aware of and become grateful to the working of the Larger Life and, at the same time, become grateful to one's own teacher. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 7

Once a person's eyes are opened and he/she says, "Oh, yes. That's the way things are." and becomes able to accept things the way they are, nothing can hinder his/her way any more. The reason is that such a person will no longer have to rely on the gods of heaven or the deities of earth and will never be threatened by the world of evil thoughts or superstitious teachings of non-Buddhist thoughts. Such a person will never feel the pressure from his/her past deeds. No good deeds will surpass the workings of the Larger Life. Hence,

the path of an awakened person is never disturbed. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 8

Becoming able to see the world the way it is is not the result of self-effort, nor is it a moral goodness. It is not the result of self-effort because this realization does not come from one's efforts in trying to do so. It is not a moral goodness because this state of mind is not created by one's own calculation. Since it arises from deep inside of human nature already designed by the Larger Life, it can be called neither self-effort nor a moral goodness. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 9

You raised a question as to why you have no feeling of wanting to dance with joy or wanting to reach the Pure State of being even if your eyes are opened and you have said "Oh, yes. That's the way it is." Well, I feel the same way just as you do, Yui-yen. Being able to see the world as it is is without doubt one of the greatest events of life, yet you don't feel like dancing or leaping for joy. This fact is all the more the proof that your enlightenment in your future life is guaranteed. What suppresses the feeling of rejoicing is the working of human nature reacting to both good and evil. While this human nature is designed by the Larger Life of the universe, another aspect of human nature is designed in such a way as to be awakened to see the world as it is. Learning that all the workings of the Grand Design are for our own sake, we feel all the more that the Grand Design is promising.

Having no special desire to reach the Pure State of being immediately, we soon start worrying we might die when we feel even slightly ill. All this is the result of the working of human nature designed in such a way. It is not easy to abandon the old home of suffering which is rooted far in the past and we have no longing for being born into the world of Eternal Peace which, as yet, we have not seen. Truly this is because of the workings of worldly and blind passions, which are part of our human nature. No matter how badly we have wanted to stay here, we have to part from this world helplessly and move on to that Land when our time runs out. This certainly is a piteous part of our human nature. Because of this, the Grand Design of human nature all the more appears to be promising and we are sure to enter the Pure State.

If a person felt like dancing with joy and wished to reach the Pure State of being, which means dying, one would begin to wonder if this person were equipped with human nature including worldly and blind passions. These are the words of my teacher.

Chapter 10

If you ask me what "ism" Shin Buddhism is, I must answer "no ism" is the "ism" of Shin Buddhism. For it lies in the realm beyond human endeavour and it cannot be described in words; it cannot be explained, nor can it possibly be imagined. These are the words of my teacher.

Preface to the Second Part

In the days when our teacher Shinran-Shonin was still alive, those of us who shared the same aspiration and longed to establish confidence in life in the days to come travelled together to Kyoto, the capital, and listened to his teaching. Many of us are in the position of preaching his teachings today and innumerable people,

young and old, have come together to practice his way of life. However, among them are some who preach divergent ideas of which our teacher Shinran-Shonin never spoke. The sections which follow give particulars of such heretical teachings and the reasons why the assertions of such teachings are groundless.

Chapter 11

Upon seeing fellow Buddhists who cannot read or write even a single character recite the name of Larger Life, some preachers intimidate them and confuse them by saying, “Do you recite the name of the Larger Life believing in the unimaginable Grand Design or do you believe in the inconceivable workings of the Larger Life of the universe?” without even explaining the details of the two. For the sake of correct and clear understanding of the teaching, we must bring our serious attention to such practices.

By the workings of our own human nature which has been designed by the Larger Life of the universe, our eyes are opened, and upon seeing the world as it is we voice our understanding, “Oh, yes. That’s the way it is,” which is so easy to practice and so easy to maintain. We are able to establish our confidence by waving off doubts of life assisted by the compassionate Grand Design imbedded in us. Our eyes are opened not through our deliberate efforts but through the workings of the Larger Life. Once the Grand Design of human nature acts and brings us to our senses, we are able to establish our confidence and keep on living. If we recognize the inconceivable Grand Design imbedded in us, we also recognize the inconceivable Larger Life of the universe included in it. Hence, the inconceivable Grand Design and the inconceivable Larger Life are one and the same; there is no difference between the two.

Further, there are those people who use their own judgement and distinguish good and evil, saying good helps the awakening and evil hinders the awakening. Such people are completely ignorant of the Grand Design, which is part of human nature. These people try to pave their own way and see the world the way they want to see it instead of accepting what comes into their sight. Neither do they recognize the inconceivable workings of the Larger Life of the universe. These self-made men waste much of their time entertaining thoughts of their own, giving themselves up to momentary pleasure, fortifying themselves against other ideas, and nestling in a faulty place of rest like a womb. Even for these people, there will be a time when they open their eyes and see the world as it is. This is solely because such ability is designed in human nature through the workings of the Larger Life of the universe. Therefore, the inconceivable Larger Life and Grand Design are simply one.

Chapter 12

There is an assertion that those who do not read and study the sutras and commentaries will never attain enlightenment. Such a contention is not even worth discussing. Various sutras and commentaries of Buddhism that reveal the teachings of selfless awareness tell us to have faith in the Grand Design of human nature, which will lead us to see the world as it is and make us say, “Yes, it is so.” All there is for attaining Buddhahood lies in this simple process and no other academic endeavour is necessary. Anyone who is confused about this reasoning should indeed pursue his/her study and learn the essence of the Grand Design of human nature. It is pity if one reads and studies the sutras and commentaries and still does not understand the fundamentals of sacred teachings. Since this simple process of awakening could occur to anyone including those who cannot read or write a single character and all it takes is to accept things the way they are, it is called the

easy way. Buddhist practice based on academic endeavour is the way of Sages and is called the hard way. Do we not have writings that state it is a mistake to engage in academic activities for the sake of prestige or profit? Such people will never be able to see the world in its true state.

Recently there have been disputes between those who have faith in the workings of the Larger Life alone and those who lead a highly disciplined way of life as Sages saying “Our school is superior and their school is inferior.” Such disputes will only bring about enemies of one’s own school and may even end up in criticizing Buddha’s teachings themselves. Is this not an act of self-destruction? If anyone from another school says, “The teaching to have faith in the workings of the Larger Life of the universe is for worthless people,” do not argue with them. But say, “Indeed, it is the teaching for us trivial folks who cannot even read or write. Yet, it does explain the salvation of all without discrimination. Although it might appear primitive to those who are learned and hold high esteem, for us it is the best teaching. Although the teachings of other schools are superior and more demanding than ours, our capacities are limited and we can hardly follow their practice. Since the whole purpose of practicing Buddhism is to free ourselves from worldly sufferings and we have our own way of doing it, please leave us alone.” If you remain humble and refrain from being aggressive, who would turn hostile toward you?

It is also written, “Where there are disputes, ugly blind evil passions arise. A wise person would stay away.”

My teacher, the late Shinran-Shonin once said, “Śākyamuni the Buddha, when he preached, said ‘There are some who will have confidence in my teaching and others who will slander it.’ Well, I have confidence in his teaching and there are others who are very critical of it. How true Buddha’s teachings are! This gives even more assurance to anyone who is willing to follow his way in life. Having said so, if there are no people who slander our teaching, you might even begin to wonder why there are no such people when there are those who show confidence in it. Nevertheless, our teaching does not necessarily have to be criticized all the time. Buddha already knew there would be both those who agree with a certain idea and those who disagree. He has left us this teaching to remove doubts and anxieties from the followers of later times.”

These days, isn’t academic pursuit made solely for the purpose of engaging in a debate and winning an argument? The true value of those who are engaged in academic pursuit is to learn the fundamental meaning of the Larger Life and the vastness of the Grand Design, and to tell those who wonder if they are not good enough for salvation that the Grand Design of the Larger Life does not discriminate the good from the evil or the pure from the impure. Only by doing so, can the scholars show their worthiness.

If there are those who threaten those people who are innocently accepting the state of the world as it is by saying hard study is the only way for enlightenment, they are obstacles to teaching and enemies of Buddha. They have not only failed to establish confidence in life arising from deep within but confused others with their own misunderstandings. They should fear in humbleness the possibility of going against the teaching of the late teacher, and should pity themselves for not being in accord with the Grand Design of the Larger Life.

Chapter 13

There is an assertion that those who are not afraid of evil because their faith rests in the inconceivable Grand Design of the Larger Life are not subject to salvation because their faith is based on arrogance and pride. Such an assertion arises from uncertainty about the Grand Design and those who speak of it do not un-

derstand the matrix of human activities which are sometimes regarded as good and sometimes evil.

Good thoughts arise from the accumulation of the past course of events, interactions, experiences and circumstances. A person gets involved in bad activities because he/she is led to do so by the past course of events, interactions, experiences, and circumstances. The late Shinran-Shonin said, “There is not a single act of evil done, even if it is as small as a particle of dust on the tip of a rabbit’s hair or sheep’s fleece that is not caused by the integration of the past course of events.

On another occasion he said to me, “Yui-en, will you have confidence in what I tell you?” When I said, “Yes, I will,” he demanded my confirmation by saying, “Are you sure you will never disobey me?” So I humbly affirmed my willingness to obey him. Whereupon he said, “To begin with, go and kill one thousand people, then your salvation is guaranteed.” When he said this, I responded, “I would hate to disobey you, but with my capacity I cannot even kill a single person.” Then he said in a very stern voice, “Why did you say you would never disobey what I, Shinran, was about to tell you?” and went on to say, “You see. If you could always act of your own free will, you would immediately kill one thousand people to have your salvation guaranteed. However, you would not kill a single person because you are not meant to kill; you are not put into the position of killing, due to the accumulation of past circumstances. It is not that you do not kill because your heart is good. On the other hand, even if you didn’t want to kill a single person, there might be time when you have to kill one hundred or even one thousand people.” He told me this story because he wanted to show me that we often forget our salvation occurs through the workings of our inner nature already designed by the Larger Life and mistakenly believe our good deeds lead us to our salvation and our evil deeds lead us to non-salvation.

When Shinran-Shonin was still alive, there was a person who was led by mistaken ideas and claimed since the Grand Design of human nature is designed in such a way to bring salvation to those who have done evil deeds, one should purposefully engage oneself in evil deeds to create the cause of salvation. This argument gradually began to be heard here and there. When Shinran-Shonin heard this, he wrote in his letter, “Do not take poison intentionally even if you know there is an antidote.” He wanted to correct such misled contentions.

However, it does not mean evil doing will obstruct salvation. If it were possible to gain confidence in the Grand Design only through maintaining discipline and observing rules, how could any one of us ever become free of human sufferings? Salvation for such humble and wretched beings like us becomes possible because we are made to realize the wonder of such workings. Then how could we engage ourselves in evil doing when the reason and cause of such doing are not imbedded in our Design?

On another occasion, Shinran-Shonin said, “Those who make a living by drawing nets in seas and rivers and by angling, those who make a living by hunting beasts in the fields and mountains and by catching fowl, and those who make a living by cultivating rice paddies and fields, are all the same. If a person is put in a position to do something through the course of development, this person would do anything. Although this is what Shinran-Shonin said, some priests pretend they are smart enough to know all about life and death and prohibit those who have done wrong to say the words of enlightenment, “Oh, yes. It is so.” Some priests put posters at the place of gathering that say, “Anyone who has committed such and such deeds should not enter this place.” All of these people try to show good conduct on the surface, but lead a life of double standards within.

If someone commits evil presuming that the Grand Design will open the way to salvation, the evil is still committed through the course of development in the past. Therefore, one should regard both good and evil as consequences of one's past relationship to the world and leave everything to the workings of the Great Design of human nature. This is what we call coming to selfless awareness.

In *Yuishin-sho* (*Essence of Faith Alone*) Seikaku writes, "What do you know about the power of the Larger Life of the universe when you think it cannot save you because you are too sinful to be saved?" It is because you are counting on the Grand Design to awaken you that your confidence in it becomes firm and decisive.

If salvation through the workings of the Grand Design by the Larger Life were to become effective only after one has removed all the impurities, evil passions, and sins, it would not be necessary for one to count on the Grand Design to lead to salvation. Anyone who had rid himself of all the worldly passions through his own efforts would attain Buddhahood instantly. If such self-achieving salvation were possible, we human beings would not need the Grand Design in ourselves to open our eyes and let us see the world as it is. It took the unimaginable length of time of five kalpas for all the laws of the Larger Life to be formed and for the Grand Design in us to be formed.

Those who accuse their fellow Buddhists of depending on the workings of the Grand Design seem to have enough worldly passions in themselves. It means they are also counting on the workings of the Grand Design for the final salvation. What kind of evil doing needs to rely on the Grand Design for salvation and what kind of evil doing doesn't? Those who accuse other people of relying on the Grand Design for salvation are immature in their thinking.

Chapter 14

There is an assertion that one should voice the magic phrase "Oh, yes. It is so." believing that if one voiced this phrase once, all the sins and evil deeds committed in the past eight billion kalpas would be wiped away. It is written in a sutra that a person who has committed ten transgressions against mankind and five offences against moral principles and has never been able to see the world as it is can have his sins of eight billion kalpas nullified if he voices the phrase once through the guidance of an enlightened teacher at his deathbed. If he voiced the phrase ten times, all the sins of ten times eight billion bygone kalpas will be nullified.

This passage is written in the sutra in order to make us realize how grave the ten transgressions and five offences are. However, if it were understood that this occurs at the moment of death, it would fall far short of the true teaching.

The true teaching is that, when our eyes are opened by the light of the Larger Life, our confidence in life becomes as hard as diamond and a very stable and solid mental and spiritual condition is achieved. This naturally leads to a very peaceful end-of-life and certainly to the state equal to perfect enlightenment.

Without the Grand Design in human nature that prompts us to open our eyes, how could sinful evil doers like us ever be liberated from the suffering of daily life? Every time we voice the phrase, "Oh, yes. It is so," we do not do so to be rid of our own sins, but we do so in gratitude for the compassion and shared sadness of the Larger Life toward those who can never get rid of sins and evil deeds until the moment of death.

If one thinks one can cleanse oneself of all the sins one has committed by voicing the phrase, "Oh, yes.

It is so,” one is trying to cleanse oneself through one’s own efforts in an attempt at enlightenment. If that is the case, everything one thinks and one does is self-centred and related to personal interests. Unfortunately, such a person can never say, “Oh, yes. It is so,” in the true sense until the moment of death. We each carry a different past and different course of events and we never know what unexpected incident we may have to face during our life time. We might be even ill physically or mentally when we have to face our death and we might not be able to maintain peace of mind at the moment of death. When we die without repenting, how can we ever cleanse ourselves of all the sins and evil deeds we have committed during our life time? Can’t we seek salvation in the Pure State if we cannot rid ourselves of sins? No, it would not matter even if we could not have the time or chance to do away with our sins. We will move into the Pure State smoothly and swiftly. Salvation is universal and unconditional. That is the nature of the Grand Design by the Larger Life of the universe.

If one were to voice, “Oh, yes. It is so,” at one’s deathbed in an attempt to rid oneself of lifetime sins and seek salvation thereupon, it would be regarded as a very selfish act ignorant of the power of the Grand Design. When one says, “Oh, yes. It is so,” it means “I will leave everything to the workings of the Grand Design. Let things happen as they happen.”

Chapter 15

There is an assertion that one attains enlightenment while one is still filled with worldly blind passions. Such an assertion is totally absurd. The attainment of Buddhahood by a person of flesh and blood is the essence of the esoteric teaching of Shingon (*zhēnyán* or *mantra*) Buddhism, to be achieved through the practice of three mystic acts. It is also the teaching of the elitist One Vehicle School based on the Lotus Sutra, in which one purifies six senses by practicing four peace-achieving exercises. These are unrealistically difficult practices that can be carried out only by extremely gifted persons through intense concentration of the mind.

The Pure Land Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches the completion of the pure state of being only at the end of life in this world. Until that moment, one is only awakened to see the reality of this world in contrast to the pure state and gains confidence in life now and in life to come. This is an easy way which can be practiced by those of inferior capacity. It is the law that does not discriminate between good and evil.

It is extremely unrealistic and unlikely that one can be rid of all the worldly desires, blind passions and the obstructions of evil in this life. It is so unlikely to happen that the supposedly pure monks of Shingon and Lotus Sutra teachings even pray for enlightenment in the next life. Needless to say is it not much more unlikely for those of us who are far inferior?

Although we are incapable of practicing highly disciplined exercises, nor do we have wisdom to win enlightenment, there is a moment of enlightenment when we let the ship of the Larger Life’s Grand Design carry us, across the ocean of suffering of life and death to reach the shore of the land of reward. Then the dark clouds of worldly desires clear immediately, the moon of awakening rises to show the world as it is, and we become one with the unhindered light that shines on ten corners of the world to bring blessing to all living things.

If people were to claim they could attain enlightenment while maintaining their bodily existence in this world, just like Śākyamuni the Buddha, they should be able to show thirty-two countenances and eighty secondary features to appear in different forms, preach the truth and save people. If such a thing were possible,

it could be called a perfect example of enlightenment in this world.

One of the hymns written by Shinran-Shonin states:

At the very moment when
Diamond-like firm confidence is established,
The light of wisdom of the Larger Life grasps and protects us, and
Forever puts us far beyond the suffering of life and death.

This means once our eyes are opened by the light of wisdom, which is already imbedded in us by the Larger Life, we would never go wandering again without knowing where to settle down. Such a supreme state of mind is often confused with attaining enlightenment. What a pity this is!

The late Shinran-Shonin said, “The teaching of Pure Land Buddhism is that you establish confidence in life through the workings of the Grand Design in this world, and attain enlightenment in the next world. This is what I heard from my teacher Honen-Shonin.”

Chapter 16

There is an assertion that every time a person who has already established confidence in life gets angry in naturalness, engages in wrong doing, or gets into argument with his fellow Buddhists, he should, without fail, reorient himself (repent). Isn't this person trying to attain enlightenment by removing evil and accumulating good?

One who is solely devoted to Shin Buddhism will reorient himself only once. Suppose a person who is not aware of Shin Buddhism and its teaching of selfless awareness brought about by the Grand Design encounters the workings of the Larger Life and realizes he cannot possibly attain enlightenment through his own efforts. Then instead of making further worldly attempts, he turns around and decides to commit everything to the natural course of development. This turn-around is the reorientation that should occur only once in one's life.

If one were able to attain enlightenment by reorienting or repenting on every occasion day and night, since human life is such a brief moment, shorter than a moment when exhaled breath hardly gets inhaled, one would not have a chance to reorient oneself or for the state of mind to become peaceful and firm before the end of one's life. If that were the case, the Grand Design by the Larger Life that every human being is capable of opening his eyes wouldn't have any meaning.

Some people merely pay lip service to the Grand Design and say they should just leave it to the Grand Design's workings, but in their heart they are thinking, “Even though they say the work of the Grand Design by the Larger Life leads us to salvation, only those people who accumulate good deeds are eligible for salvation,” and they lack in their hearts to leave everything to the course of natural development. Such people will end up in a state of mind far from the Pure State. It is most lamentable.

Once firm confidence is established, enlightenment will be brought about by the work of the Larger Life; therefore, it is not necessary to make detailed designs for one's life. Even if one were engaged in wrong doing, that person should rely more and more on the workings of the Grand Design. Then, as a natural consequence, a gentle heart and patient mind will develop.

Whatever you do, when it comes to the matter of enlightenment, without any clever presumption, you should remind yourself of the gravity of the workings of the Larger Life. When you see this, you will most

likely voice spontaneously, “Oh, yes. It is so.” This is naturalness. You let things happen as a course of natural consequence. This is also selflessness. Nevertheless, I hear some people are claiming what is called naturalness is a phenomenon different from this. How deplorable!

Chapter 17

There is an assertion that a person who is suspended in an arbitrary state of enlightenment will in the end fall into hell. Where in our sacred writings can one find such a contention? It is lamentable that such an argument is made by those people who pretend to be scholars. What is their understanding of the basic Buddhist texts like sutras and commentaries?

Those who practice Buddhism but have not established confidence are in doubt of the workings of the Grand Design of the Larger Life. Such people will remain in an arbitrary state of enlightenment. However, while they are in that self-made world, the Grand Design of the Larger Life inside them is still at work, and it will finally open their eyes leading to the final enlightenment. This is what I have heard.

Since the number of those who establish confidence from the beginning is few, many are led to remain in an arbitrary stage as a makeshift measure. To say what comes next is a total failure or the road to hell would be the same as saying Śākyamuni the Buddha has lied.

Chapter 18

There is an assertion that one will become a large or a small Buddha after attaining enlightenment depending on the amount of one's offering to Buddhist institutions and Buddhist monks. This is nonsense, unspeakable nonsense. It simply does not make sense.

In the first place, how can one determine the size of Buddha and say large or small? When Śākyamuni the Buddha talked about the greatness of the Master Teacher in the Pure Land, it was an analogy to make it easier for people to understand the phenomenon which cannot be described, which cannot be explained, or which cannot even be imagined. Once enlightenment is attained, there is no value judgement such as long, short, square, or round or value-oriented recognition of blue, yellow, red, white, or black. In such a state, how can one determine large or small?

It is written in a sutra, when one says, “Oh, yes. It is so,” one will see a vision of the transformed figure of Buddha, and see a great Buddha when said loudly and a small Buddha when said softly. This is also an analogy. I wonder if those who talk about the amount of offerings are applying this portion of the sutras to their own profit.

Giving is a highly respected act in Buddhism. However, no matter how precious a treasure one offers at the altar of Buddha or to one's teacher, it does not mean anything if one fails to have confidence in the Larger Life. If one does not even give a small denomination note or a half-unit coin to a Buddhist institution or to a priest, as long as one commits oneself entirely to the natural course of development and has confidence in the Larger Life, one is in accord with the workings of the Grand Design. Because those who talk about the amount of offering are attached to worldly desires, they threaten their fellow Buddhists on the pretext of teaching Buddhism.

Postscript

All of the assertions cited above must have arisen from the divergent understandings about confidence compared with true confidence in the Larger Life.

Once Shinran-Shonin told me a story about the time when his teacher Honen-Shonin was still alive. Although there were many students at Honen-Shonin's place, there were only a few who had the same sense of confidence in the Larger Life as Honen-Shonin did and Shinran-Shonin got into an argument with his fellow students. Here is what happened:

When Shinran-Shonin, then named Zenshin, said, "The confidence held by me, Zenshin, and the confidence held by Honen-Shonin are one and the same," his fellow students such as Seikan and Nembutsu said, "Impossible! How can the confidence held by Honen-Shonin be the same as that of Zenshin?" In response to this, Shinran-Shonin said, "Indeed, Honen-Shonin is a man of great wisdom and vast knowledge. If I were to claim I have the same wisdom and knowledge as Honen-Shonin, I would be wrong. But as far as the confidence in the fact we all attain the Pure State in the world of the Larger Life, we share the same confidence." Other fellow students, however, were still critical by saying, "How can it be true?" Since there was no end to the argument, they decided to ask Honen-Shonin whose contention was true. After he had listened to the claims of both sides, the Shonin said, "The confidence held by me, Genku (another name for Honen), arises from the working of the Larger Life. The confidence held by Zenshin also arises from the working of the Larger Life. Hence, both are one and the same." Then he continued, "Anyone who is holding confidence different from mine will certainly not reach the Pure State I am going to reach." From this, we can easily see that there were already different ideas from Shinran-Shonin's in those days. Although all of the above are repetitions of the same thing, I am recording them here.

While the life of this old man, which is as little as a drop of dew on a withered blade of glass, still remains, it is possible to listen to doubts and uncertainties of my fellow Buddhists and tell them the important points of the Shonin's teachings. After my eyes are closed, I am afraid there will be a great confusion with all kinds of heretical ideas. When you become confused by different claims and ideas such as the assertions cited above, carefully consult the sacred writings which the late Shonin cherished and are in accord with his thoughts.

Generally speaking, the sacred writings consist of two aspects: the true teaching and also provisional teaching which tries to illustrate important points. Leave out illustrative teachings and take teachings with real content; abandon provisional teachings and choose teachings of the truth. That was the intent of the Shonin. Particularly be careful not to misread or misinterpret the sacred writings. I would like to extract a few important passages and attach them to this document as a standard of Shin Buddhism.

The Shonin repeatedly said, "When I reflect deeply on the Grand Design by the Larger Life, which has been deliberated for five kalpas, I am convinced it is for the sake of me Shinran alone. How grateful I am to the Grand Design which leads me to open my eyes and see the world as it is when I am the slave of all the past circumstances!" These words of the Shonin remind me of the golden saying by Shan-tao, "Know that you are a humble existence caught up in sinful conduct and suffering of life and death, and that ever since the beginning of time you have always been sinking in the sea of worldly desires and transmigrating endlessly without knowing when the liberation comes." When the Shonin kindly spoke of himself as an example, he was

trying to make us realize indirectly how serious is the accumulation of our sins and evil deeds, yet, the power of the Larger Life is always working on us trying to open our eyes to see the reality. Indeed, everybody including me is talking about how good or how bad our deeds are or our faiths are without paying much attention to the workings of the Larger Life, which is benevolently and considerately trying to lead our way to the world of true awareness.

Among the words of Shinran-Shonin were: “Good or evil, I know nothing at all about these two. The reason for saying this is: If I knew thoroughly about good, to the extent covered by the extent of the Larger Life of the universe, I could say I knew what good is. If I knew thoroughly about evil, to the extent covered by the extent of the Larger Life of the universe, I could say I knew what evil is. However, we live in a small world of our “selves” caught up in everyday affairs evolving around our worldly passions. Everything we say and do is a fake and vanity without truth and sincerity constantly changing from occasion to occasion like a burning house. In such a situation, the realization which makes us say, “Oh, yes. It is so.” alone is true and real.

When people including me come together and talk about vain and deceptive matters, there is one truly regrettable thing. That is: when we tell each other our understandings of the workings of the Larger Life and try to persuade others, we do not let those others open their mouths, and we quote and assert some things as Shinran-Shonin’s words, even things he had never said.

I want everyone to reconsider the focal points of the Shonin’s teaching and understand its true spirits.

What I have written above is not by any means words of my own. Since I am not well versed in the logic of sutras or in the discourse of commentaries, some points may sound awkward. However, I would feel fortunate if I could recall even a hundredth of what the late Shinran-Shonin spoke and I could record it here.

How sad it is; how sad it is that, even if one acknowledges the act of awakening by saying, “Oh, yes. It is so,” one is suspended in an arbitrary state of enlightenment instead of achieving true enlightenment immediately. With tears of sorrow in my eyes, I record this, hoping no further contradictions in faith will take place among fellow Buddhists of the same school.

Let the title of this document be *Tannisho: A Collection of Words Recorded in Lamentation over Heretical Teachings*. It should not be exposed to outsiders.

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